

Issue: The traditional opening date for the North Dakota pheasant hunting season is the second Saturday in October. It has been proposed that the opener be moved to the first Saturday in October.

Why:

1. An earlier season would make for a longer season. This would allow businesses in the prime pheasant range, mainly southwestern North Dakota, to have a longer business season. Motels, restaurants and fee hunting operations plus other related businesses could benefit financially.
2. North Dakota hunters would have more days of pheasant hunting prior to the arrival of our often very tough winters.

Why Not:

1. Many hunters traditionally make opening weekend a special event. The waterfowl opener, by federal regulation, usually falls on the Saturday closest to October 1. This means that some years (2003, 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010) these hunters would have only one opening weekend and would have to make a choice. This means that the number of trips that resident and nonresident hunters make to our rural hunting areas will be reduced significantly. From this perspective it is probably best to have two weeks between openers. More hunters will be able to do both.
2. Some consider our current opening date to be too early. Row crops are not harvested and the birds are not mature. Identification of immature roosters can be difficult. Complaints about this are common with our current opener.
3. Game and Fish law enforcement support for these seasons will be reduced significantly when season openers coincide. We have a set number of game wardens. The number of hunters in the field on a weekend when both pheasant and waterfowl seasons open will be considerably higher than if the seasons open on different weekends.

Alternative: Rather than move the opener to the first Saturday in October, move it to the first Saturday after the waterfowl opener. This provides for an earlier opener some years and eliminates the conflict with the waterfowl opener entirely. Example: For 2002 with a Sept. 28 waterfowl opener, the pheasant opener would be Oct. 5. Under current practice the opener would be on Oct. 12.

2001 Season: It is strongly recommended that the opening date for this year not be changed. Many hunters already have motel reservations and vacation plans. Tourism and Game and Fish publications state that the probable opener is October 13. Additionally there has been little, if any, opportunity for public input on this proposed change.

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